



To The Point Fall 2006



Newsletter of the Friends of Myrtle Point Park, Inc.

ANNUAL BERNIE FOWLER WADE-IN AT MYRTLE POINT PARK



File Copy of Myrtle Point Wade-in with Senator Bernie Fowler and Tom Wisner

The Fourth Grade students of Hollywood Elementary School joined former Senator Bernie Fowler of Calvert County in a tradition dating back to 1994. Over one hundred folks held hands and waded into the once clear and clean Patuxent River to measure its health as we watched our toes disappear in the now cloudy water. Senator Fowler is famous for this ritual that has brought attention to the plight of the Patuxent. At the Wade-in four years ago, students discovered submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) for the first time while they were seine netting at the main beach site. Because of the additional habitat, a tremendous increase in the number and diversity of animal life was also observed. Each year since both the SAV and animal life has increased. This year, even though no other factor has changed that we could see -the underwater grasses were not present and the amount and diversity of organisms have decreased dramatically. Mostly comb jellies by the thousands were brought up and as they bumped each other they began to bioluminesce. Pink and purple glow were apparent even though it was daylight. Even silversides were in amazingly small numbers; a few hundred compared to thousands in previous years. This is a real concern and is documented by our notes from other years.

Coleman Hillman held the students' interest as he guided them in creating origami swans. This was the last year for Fourth Grade teacher Tina Callas because she will be retiring. Teachers from the school and parents assisted in other activities. It was a beautiful day for celebrating and honoring both the River and our guests.

The day was highlighted by songwriter Tom Wisner who shared history and music with the students. Tom is a part of the river and the park's history and every song he writes or sings shares some of what he has lived.

Senator Fowler told the students that he was the legislator who first introduced the Bill on Environmental Education in the 80's. His initial idea was for a complete Environmental Curriculum but it was cut back to what we have today. Now we know whom to thank for providing these opportunities. Senator Fowler indicated that he will be proposing future legislation or pursuing aggressive ways to clean up the Patuxent River.

Mary Piotrowski

**A tip of the hat to Bernie and Tom
Education.**



for all they do for the River and

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www.myrtlepoint.org



Envirothon Competition – 2006

It was a beautiful morning on Tuesday April 25th when I headed out for Myrtle Point Park. St. Mary's Soil Conservation District had chosen the Park for the site of its 14th annual Envirothon competition. Which begs the question what in the world is Envirothon? The answer is it is a problem solving, hands-on, natural resource program for high school student teams. Participants are trained by Natural Resources Professionals and tested in five resource areas (soils, aquatics, wildlife, forestry, and a special environmental issue that changes each year). This year's issue was "Water Stewardship in a Changing Environment". Each student team consists of five members who learn to work cooperatively whereby they develop good problem solving and communication skills.



What a great idea, a competition based on natural resources in a park dedicated to nature! I wandered around from station to station, taking pictures and talking to the instructors while the students diligently worked against the clock. As many times as I have been in the teaching role, it was nice to be an observer for a change.

All three county high schools, the Tech Center, and St. Mary's Ryken participated in this year's competition, with a total of eleven teams. Leonardtown #1 came in first, followed by the Tech Center's Queens of the Forest, and the Fierce Planetees from Chopticon came in third. All of the teams agreed this was a much better way and place to spend the school day regardless of the outcome.

The only lasting sign of the group's use of the park is the test pit. One of the five stations done every year is a section on soils. For this they scrape and dig a test pit to use for soil profiles. They filled this back in, but you can see where the work was done if you take the last path between the two entrance. They would like to reuse this area for next year's program. (After seeing how clear the area was of invasive species like multi-flora rose, it's possible we may look back at this area as a test plot for our invasive plant removal efforts.) A dozer may be more expensive than hand pulling, but it seems to be pretty efficient.

Regardless of that issue, we hope to see the county's high schools continue to use Myrtle Point for their training and competition. This park abounds in natural resources and is a logical location for a program based on natural resources. FOMPP continues to encourage the use of the park by educational groups, be they a school like Hollywood Elementary, a special program like Envirothon, preschool or the scouts. The park has something to offer for all of these groups and for you as well.

Bob Boxwell



What is a Rain Garden?

A Rain Garden is simply a shallow depression in your yard that's planted with native wetland or wet prairie wildflowers and grasses. It is one of the most popular perennial garden designs for three reasons:

1. Rain Gardens make good use of rainwater runoff, thus conserving precious water supplies and helping protect the water quality of downstream lakes and rivers.
2. Rain Gardens are planted with native wetland and prairie wildflowers and grasses. These perennial plants naturally grew here when the first settlers arrived – so they're hardy and low-maintenance, not to mention beautiful.
3. Rain Gardens can provide food and shelter for man, interesting birds, butterflies and beneficial insects – such as dragonflies, which eat mosquitoes – and they provide you with many hours of enjoyable bird and butterfly watching.



How do I make a Rain Garden?

Just follow these easy steps:

1. Dig a shallow depression, as large in circumference as you'd like. If your yard has a natural swale feature that catches rain runoff, the your preparation is minimal.
2. Direct your downspout, sump pump outlet, or rain barrel hose into the depression. Or, if the distance is too great, pipe runoff from those sources through a buried 4-inch black plastic drain tile available at any home center.
3. Plant the native plants recommended below (or listed at www.appliedeco.com; www.wetland.org).
4. Water your new plantings every other day for the first two weeks or so, until they show that they are growing and well-established.

Once your native Rain Garden plants are established, they'll thrive without additional watering or fertilizers. Only minimal weeding is needed.

Where should I locate my Rain Garden?

Keep it at least 10 feet away from your house. Other than that, you should pick a naturally low spot in your yard, and direct water from your downspout or sump pump into it. Full sun is best, but if not possible, ensure at least a half-day of sunlight. Also during heavy rains, your depression will fill up and overflow. Make sure this overflow drainage follows the drainage pattern originally designed for your lot.



How deep should I make my Rain Garden?

A depression of 2-6 inches will suffice if you don't want standing water. If you do want standing water, dig your depression deeper, perhaps down to 18 inches in deepest spot. Slope the sides gradually from the edge to the deepest area. If you have heavy clay soil, it may hold water without a liner. With soils that drain quickly, purchase a plastic liner to hold water in the deeper areas, and install your plants around the liner edge.

Suggested native plants for well-drained soils (common names):

New England aster	Spotted Joe-Pye weed	Sneezeweed
Torrey's rush	Prairie blazing star	Cardinal flower
Great blue lobelia	Wild bergamot	Marsh phlox
Green bulrush	Stiff goldenrod	Culver's root
Golden Alexander		

...and suggestions for heavy clay soils:

Sweet flag
Bottle brush sedge
Wild blue flag iris
False dragon's head
Soft-stemmed bulrush

Swamp milkweed
Fox sedge
Cardinal flower
Green bulrush

Water plantain
Torrey's rush
Arrowhead
River bulrush



Swamp milkweed

Other tips to note:

- Avoid fertilizers near the Rain Garden, as they stimulate weeds which compete with the native plants.
- Leave dead vegetation through the winter months for visual interest as a beautifully textured winter landscape.
- In spring, mow and remove dead vegetation.

Enjoy! Kellie Gofus

Rain Garden Websites:

<http://www.raingardens.org>

From the Maryland Department of Resources website:

Why is a Rain Garden Important?

Under the general practice of storm water management, rainwater is allowed to flow out into the street and storm sewers. Eventually it flows into our regional rivers and streams. These storm waters carry pollutants such as motor oil, pesticides, fertilizers and other harmful chemicals from our lawns and driveways that cause excessive weeds, turbid water, and sediment buildup. By creating a rain garden in your yard you can reduce stormwater runoff, help recharge ground water, and provide great wildlife habitat.

To learn more about rain gardens, or other ways that you can play a role in the Chesapeake Bay Restoration effort, check:

www.dnr.state.md.us/ed or call 410.260.8710.

Make a Simple Rain Gauge

Materials:

- Clear jar
- Ruler



Put the jar outside in an open area before it starts raining. After it stops raining, measure how many inches of rain are in the jar with your ruler.

Reprinted from Wild Ones Journal, July/August 2006 issue; newsletter of Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes; www.for-wild.org .

Marc is a member of Wild Ones.

The Guardians of Chesapeake Bay

By Marc Imlay

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed has been heavily urbanized. As a result most natural areas are relatively small, and are surrounded by cities, highways, and agriculture. It consists of islands of nature in a sea of development. It's ecological history includes the full range of mid-Atlantic temperate climate habitats. Maryland was 80% contiguous forest and 20% open in pre-colonial times. Most of Maryland and much of Virginia and Pennsylvania, as well as the District of Columbia are in the watershed ranging from the marine environment, upstream to the Piedmont and the eastern end of the ridges and valleys of the Appalachian Mountains. There are shale barrens and serpentine barrens, limestone caves, and the northern most bald cypress swamp in America, Battle Creek Cypress Swamp in Calvert County, Maryland.

Guardians of the Bay

Fortunately there are literally hundreds of environmental groups working very hard to save the remaining areas from development and rescuing the protected areas from non-native invasive species, erosion and pollution.

The Anacostia Watershed Society

(www.anacostiaws.org) complements wetland restoration, native tree planting, stream bank stabilization, non-native invasive species control, and water quality monitoring with advocacy and environmental education in the local schools. We have dramatically rescued the 150-acre Little Paint Branch Park in Beltsville Maryland, a biological gem with a Virginia Magnolia wetland of special concern, from over 20% coverage of Japanese stiltgrass, English ivy, oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, Japanese and bush honeysuckle, and mile-a-minute vine to less than 15% in just one year.

The Chapman Forest Foundation

(www.chapmanforest.org), **Maryland Native Plant Society** (www.mdflora.org) and **Sierra Club** (www.marylandsierraclub.org) with many other groups rescued 2,400 acres of mature forest with over a mile of unspoiled Potomac River shoreline from the largest housing development in Maryland. Geologists have surveyed the unique natural area and have observed that the unusual geological formations constitute conditions favorable to unusual assemblages of plant and animal life. Acidic conditions on the gravel terraces defer to highly calcium-rich (calcareous) pockets in lower areas. Shells in fossil-laden marine clays contribute to these calcareous areas. These conditions overlay a relatively undisturbed tract, including ravines so steeply sloped that past clearing was hindered, so that a broad assemblage of flora and fauna persist, including many state rare, threatened, and endangered species

Botanists have verified that acid-soil loving plants indeed coexist in close proximity with calciphilic (calcium-loving) communities, so that communities unusual for the coastal plain thrive here, including the largest Maryland population of the state-endangered, calciphilic, glade fern and a dozen 1-2 foot diameter sassafras trees. Malacologists have identified a unique assemblage of snails that includes three "limestone" species rare or unexpected on the coastal plain.

Save Crow's Nest (www.savecrowsnest.org) In Northern Virginia across the Potomac River from Chapman Forest is striving to save Stafford County's 3,800-acre Crow's Nest peninsula which includes one of the last stands of old-growth forest in the Mid-Atlantic region. A 600-year-old pin oak, alive when Capt. John Smith explored the area, flourishes there. It contains some of the rarest forest communities on earth. The undeveloped shoreline is home to one of the largest heron rookeries in the Chesapeake Bay region. Bald eagles nest in the trees. In addition, the peninsula is at a strategic location that provides considerable protection for the seafood industry of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay (www.alliancechesbay.org) is a regional nonprofit organization that fosters partnerships to protect the bay and its rivers. For example it is sponsoring invasive plant removal projects in Kish Creek in Lewistown, and Canoe Creek State Park in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Dozens of other projects include bay-scaping with native plants including underwater grass planting, coastal cleanup, cover cropping to reduce nitrogen release to the Bay, and wetlands restoration.

Belt Woods, near Bowie Maryland includes 45 acres of virgin forest with ancient tulip poplar trees and light-gap openings, pit and mound topography, accumulation of downed and standing dead wood, and soils containing a rich organic layer. The density of breeding birds remains among the highest observed on the East Coast. Contact maureenfine@earthlink.net.

Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (www.arlingtonenvironment.org) leads regular weekly projects to preserve Arlington County, Virginia, natural areas in partnership with **Virginia Cooperative Extension**, and **Arlington Parks, Recreation and Community Resources** including storm-drain marking, backyard wildlife habitats and native plants, and RIP, Remove Invasive Plants.

These examples are just a small fraction of thousands of excellent programs striving to preserve and restore native communities in the Chesapeake Bay. For more information contact the organizations cited, other organizations such as the **Chesapeake Bay Foundation**, the native plant societies and **Sierra Club** chapters in the other states within the watershed and governmental natural heritage agencies.

The Chesapeake Bay is the nation's largest estuary. Its watershed covers 64,000 square miles, and covers six states and the District of Columbia. Including its major tributaries, the area rises to 69,000 square miles.

Marc Imlay, PhD

Conservation Biologist, Anacostia Watershed Society

(301-699-6204, 301-283-0808 301-442-5657 cell)

Board member of the Mid-Atlantic Exotic Pest Plant Council,

Hui o Laka at Kokee State Park, Hawaii

Vice President of the Maryland Native Plant Society,

Chair of the Biodiversity and Habitat Stewardship Committee for the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Celebrate Our Maryland Green Schools

Oakville Elementary School is the recipient of the Maryland Green School Award 2006 after meeting a variety of guidelines and goals as set forth by the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE). Awards were presented in Baltimore to 25 schools from around the state whose applications covering their work over the last two and three years were reviewed by educators, Maryland Department of Natural Resource specialists, Maryland State Department officials, teachers, Nature Center directors, naturalists and an environmentally and educationally oriented audience! These schools were required to adhere to their curricula while integrating environmental science, values and restoration projects in particular throughout their school. All grades needed to be involved. Tougher yet is the interaction in environmental issues at the community level. Much of this must come from the students themselves through awareness and written communication. This is where Friends of Myrtle Point Park (FOMPP) and several of our individual members have been involved with Oakville and other Green Schools. Our new Board member, Margarita Rochow, a former teacher at Oakville is now the Environmental Educator with the St. Mary's County School System.

Other environmental groups in Southern Maryland are also involved with assisting the local schools in environmental projects and providing some supplies. Some of the groups that interact with the schools are: Southern Maryland Audubon, Sierra Club Southern Maryland Group, the St. Mary's River Watershed Association and the Lower Potomac Tributary Team.

Oakville was involved in a variety of projects but their most exciting project was the creation of a new habitat, a native meadow, behind their school. The parent and teacher team did a lot of the work before turning it into a classroom activity. They visited Hollywood Elementary School (HES) and I was able to share with them the process with the 1996 Red Fox Meadow. They chose a method different from the one used by Hollywood. They eliminated the grass by using black plastic and solar heat. Their meadow is thriving and the topic was integrated across all subject areas. Oakville proudly raised their Green Flag after the Awards Ceremony in May. This year marked the largest number of new schools to be honored by the State of Maryland since starting the program in 1999. There are now 136 Green Schools in the state.

Hollywood Elementary School was one of the original Green Schools of 1999 and has continued to practice integrated Environmental Education. HES was one of 11 schools to reapply and to be accepted for r-certification. Schools are required to reapply every 3 years and this is HES' second successful recertification. This year a large scrapbook was submitted to act as a three-year history and to serve as a teaching tool. The favorite events include teaching at the school habitats; Tadpole Pond, Red Fox Meadow, the Forest, the Stream and the Annual Bernie Fowler Wade-In.

Mary Piotrowski



HABITAT PROTECTION INVITES CREATES SAFE HAVEN!!!

While walking the Myrtle Point Park (MPP) perimeter in early June it was the screeching of gray fox pups that drew me off trail and into Deep Woods forest. Otherwise, we might never have noticed our best kept secret all the long hot summer. Protected and surrounded by Isabel and tornado downed trees, the pitiful babes were hard to reach but so was their food supply. The fox family was part of the story but the croaking, clacking and finally Pterodactyl screams alerted us to the heron nests above! MPP now has a **heron rookery!** It's one of the two largest in St. Mary's and we have tallied 14 heron nests and 1 egret nest. The egret suffered the only two fatalities with both a newly hatched young and adult on the ground. Once on the ground the adult could not feed and was unable to maneuver its wings through the tree branches to return to the top of the trees. This is the gray fox connection and there were signs everywhere: scat, dens, bones, feathers trailing everywhere!



We registered the site with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage first by aerial map and later with coordinates. Glenn Thierres, Program Manager, told us that this registration allows MPP a quarter-mile protection about the nesting area. We also registered the site with Dave Brinker of the Department of Natural Resources Colonial Bird Research Project of which heron information is of value. Kyle Rambo, Conservation Director at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station provided information on gray fox, heron and egrets.

I made numerous notes concerning the trees, egg shells, preening, dates, etc. It was interesting that they were here specifically because all the Loblollies they had selected to nest in were taller, stronger and well spaced for easy wing access. This was the result of the weaker trees being knocked down in that area. The glen of New York ferns below the heronry was whitewashed and as eggs hatched often littered with crab parts and silversides then later mummichugs. In the heat it 'got ripe' in there. Kyle's only advice was to make sure we didn't "Love them to death".

One or two of us went in at a time and only a half dozen times in the three month period. The rookery was not visible by boat or trail and it became apparent they had a natural protection. As I presented their information more formally as needed to protect the site I did add one feature about the ecosystem. As the canopy had opened up and sunlight came in New York ferns and other volunteer plants emerged attracting deer. We picked up antlers from two different bucks and saw fresh droppings every visit as well as a doe and fawn who kept us company. But with deer come ticks and we mean lots and lots of them. Personally, I removed 300 by my third visit and after that I didn't worry quite so much about hordes of visitors. It also noticed the herons took no notice of anything below them. Although I sincerely believe they were purposely "whitewashing" me every time I visited.

We need to continue to be vigilant in protecting this natural park. We need to procure more parkland for the same purpose. We have proof now it's needed and works if we leave things alone. Let's look forward to spring and the arrival of the herons and egrets to Myrtle Point Nature Park.

I will be posting a more detailed account on our website www.myrtlepoint.org by the first of October.



Mary Piotrowski

Calendar of Events

RiverFest 2006 sponsored by the The St. Mary's River Watershed Association will be held from Noon to 4:00 PM, Saturday, **September 30, 2006** at the Chesapeake Bay Field Lab on St. George Island. Festivities will include skipjack rides, oyster tonging, water quality sampling, seine netting, bird walks, exhibits, pumpkin painting, food, drinks, and much more.

Patuxent River Appreciation Days, Saturday, October 7, 2006 Sunday October 8, 2006, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, MD.

For information: <http://www.pradinc.org/>

State of the River Summit - 1:00 p.m. on Friday, October 6th.
Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, MD

For the first time, the weekend festivities will be preceded by a “State of the River Summit” at the Calvert Marine Museum, Chaired by Senator Bernie Fowler, the undisputed champion of the river, and led by The Patuxent River Commission in partnership with the Chesapeake Biological Lab, the summit will bring together the experts in the field to discuss the current state of the river, what still needs to be done, and how each of us can contribute to a clean, healthy Patuxent.

The summit is open to everyone who cares about the Patuxent River and keeping it clean and beautiful for generations to come.

The Chesapeake Biological Lab will be hosting an open house with lectures and tours from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on October 7th in conjunction with PRAD. The schedule is not finalized, but check the website for information: www.cbl.umces.edu.

The Chesapeake Biological Lab is hosting another in its series of Science Socials on Wednesday, 11 October.

Dr. David Wright will discuss current research on invasive aquatic species introduced through ship ballast waters and methodologies for eradication.

The event is in the Bernie Fowler Laboratory on Williams Street.

5:30-6pm - wine & cheese mixer with scientist & researchers

6-7pm - topic discussion, Q&A period

For additional information, please, call (410) 326-4281

Wild Auction 2006: For the benefit of the Battle Creek Nature Education Society, Saturday, October 21, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m., Location: Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Nature Center. This auction is for Adults Only. For information: 410-535-5327

Summerseat Farm Second Annual Mennonite Quilt Auction, Saturday, October 28, 2006, Preview – 9 a.m., Auction – 10 a.m. Baked Goods and Crafts will also be available. Call 301-373-3573 for information or visit the website: www.summerseat.org. Summerseat is located just north of Route 247 (Loveville Road), watch for the signs.

Friends of Myrtle Point Meetings are open to the public. The Friends can provide varying levels of assistance for field studies. Call Dudley Lindsley, 301-373-2551 for additional information. There are no entry fees for the Park.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION:

Return to:
Friends of Myrtle Point Park, Inc.
P.O. Box 1433
California, Maryland 20619-1433

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Membership: _____ Individual(s) - \$10.00 (check to Friends of Myrtle Point Park, Inc.)

_____ Families - \$15.00 (check to Friends of Myrtle Point Park, Inc.)

Interests:

_____ Historical/Archeological

_____ Invasive Plant Removal

_____ Trail Maintenance

_____ Education

_____ Public Relations

_____ Species Identification

_____ Other: _____

Friends of Myrtle Point Park, Inc.
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Help us preserve, maintain and enhance what is special about Myrtle Point Park. Join the Friends of Myrtle Point Park, Inc.